



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DPI 2005-160

Thursday, December 15, 2005

CONTACT: Joseph Donovan, Communications Officer, (608) 266-3559

**Family, social support vital in protecting
youth from risky behaviors**

MADISON—A new survey reports that the vast majority of Wisconsin students have family support that helps insulate them from risky behaviors that tend to imperil youth development and success in school.

The biennial Youth Risk Behavior Survey, completed by 2,389 ninth- through 12th-grade students in 52 public high schools in spring 2005, showed that 88 percent of youth report they have families that give them love and support. Three-fourths of students also said they had two or more adults, other than their parents, they could turn to for support, and more than two-thirds of students felt their teachers really care about them and give them a lot of encouragement.

“Most young people have networks of caring support—parents, family, teachers, and other adults—that help them navigate the path to successful adulthood,” said State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster. “These positive relationships in the lives of our youth are like a shield against the lure of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and early sexual behavior that can be so detrimental.”

Burmaster noted that popular culture tends to glamorize alcohol use and other risky behaviors that can lead young people to believe that “everyone is doing it.” However, the results of this survey show most youth avoid fighting or carrying weapons, sexual intercourse, and tobacco, alcohol, or marijuana use. “It is important for students to know that most of their peers do not engage in these negative behaviors because misperceptions can lead to risk-taking,” Burmaster said.

One of the bright points of the survey was the decline in tobacco use which went from 32 percent of students in 1993 to 23 percent in 2005. The percentage of students who began smoking before the age

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of 13 declined from 27 percent to 13 percent. The percentage of students smoking on school property dropped from 13 percent in 1993 to 6 percent in 2005. The survey also showed

- fewer students are experimenting with alcohol before the age of 13;
- current levels of alcohol use (past 30 days and binge drinking) and marijuana use (ever used and past 30 days) are showing signs of decreasing from a high in 2001;
- fewer students are having sex; those who are sexually active are abstaining longer before first sexual intercourse; and among sexually active youth, more are using condoms;
- fewer students have seriously considered attempting suicide;
- more students are wearing seat belts on a consistent basis and fewer are a passenger in a car in which the driver has been drinking; and
- students are less likely to experience violence at school – fewer fights, threats of violence, and weapons.

“Risky behaviors tend to have a negative impact on students’ academic success,” Burmaster said. “Students who have strong family and teacher support and feel connected at school are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. Additionally, students who report earning higher grades, mostly A’s and B’s, are less likely than those with lower grades to be involved in risky health and safety behaviors.”

The survey showed several areas of concern. While levels of student exercise were up overall, the improvement was mostly among males. One out of four students watch three or more hours of television on an average

Survey Highlights						
(percent of 9th- through 12th-grade students who report)						
	1993	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005
Having Family Support	NA	81	81	82	88	88
Exercising Regularly	64	62	60	64	63	71
Feeling Safe at School	94	97	96	94	94	95
Never Having Sexual Intercourse	53	59	59	61	63	60
Fighting at School	16	13	11	11	12	12
Fighting Anywhere	39	34	33	31	31	33
Carrying Weapons	19	15	18	13	13	16
Considering Suicide	27	24	22	20	20	18
Using Tobacco	32	36	38	33	24	23
Using Tobacco at School	13	17	16	10	8	6
Using Alcohol	48	51	52	54	47	49
Binge Drinking	29	31	34	34	28	31
Using Marijuana	11	21	21	25	22	16
Receiving Drug Offers at School	20	28	29	27	26	22

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school day, and one-fourth of students are either at risk of becoming overweight or are overweight according to their Body Mass Index. A Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction initiative, “Movin’ and Munchin’ Schools,” helps students and their families develop lifetime skills and habits of physical activity and healthy nutritional choices. (Additional information is available on the DPI’s School Health Education and Physical Activity website at < <http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/healtheducation.html> >).

Despite signs of improvement in Wisconsin, students still report high levels of alcohol use, including binge drinking and drinking and driving. Additionally too many students report they have access to illegal drugs on school grounds. Levels of students experiencing depression or attempting suicide remain unchanged.

“We work with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control to collect data on student health behavior to get a better picture of what’s working and where we need to make improvements to protect student health,” Burmaster said. “Schools, DPI staff members, and community partners use this information to develop teaching tools, programs, and materials to counter misperceptions and reduce risky health behaviors that can create barriers to learning and successful development into adulthood.”

The 2005 Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey was conducted as part of a national effort to monitor health-risk behaviors among the nation’s high-schoolers. Students voluntarily completed a self-administered, anonymous, 99-item questionnaire. Survey procedures protect the privacy of students. Local parental permission procedures were followed before survey administration.

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NOTES: The Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey questionnaire, Executive Summary, and PowerPoint presentation can be found on the Department of Public Instruction website at < <http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/yrbsindx.html> >.